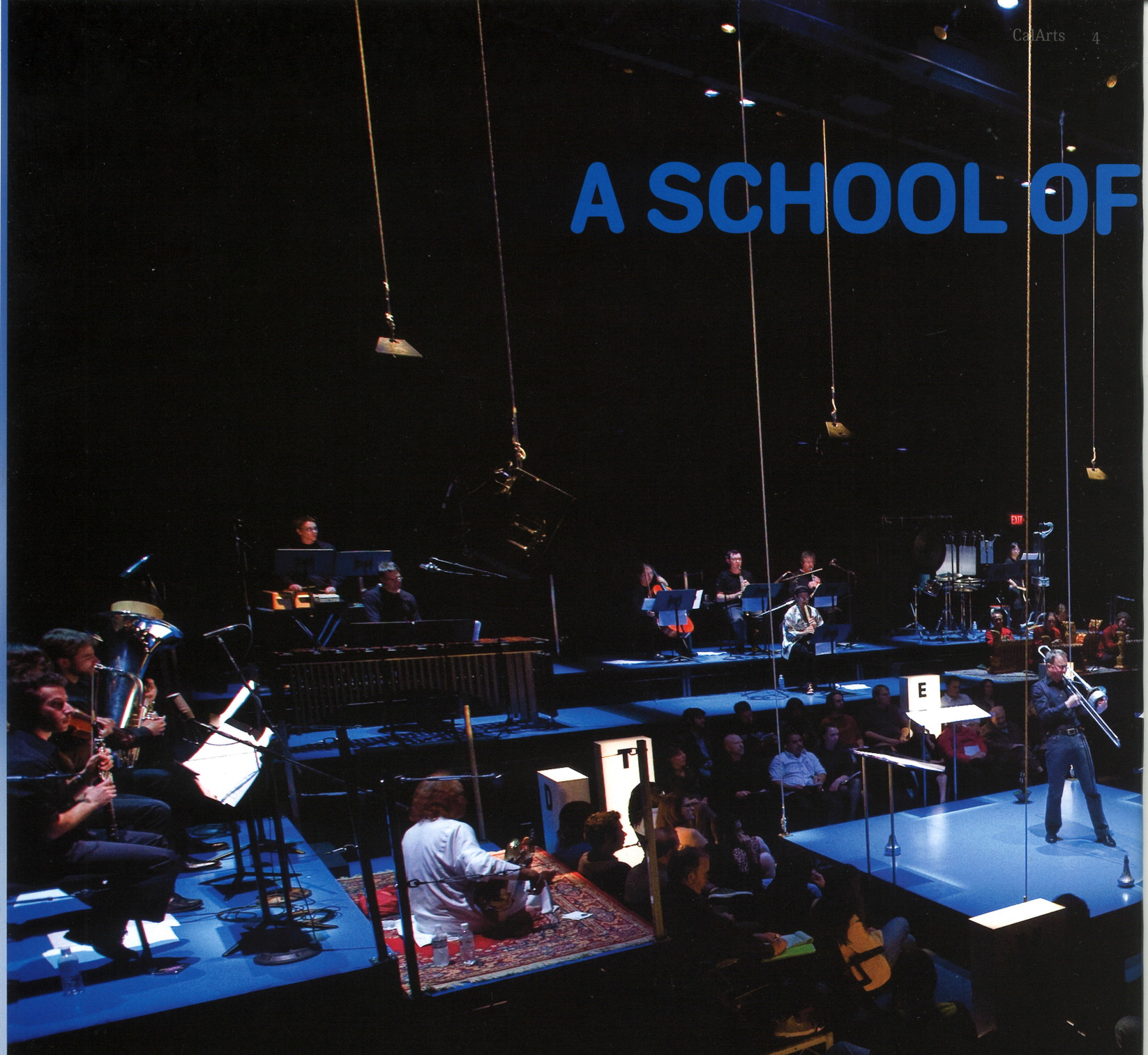
A SCHOOL OF

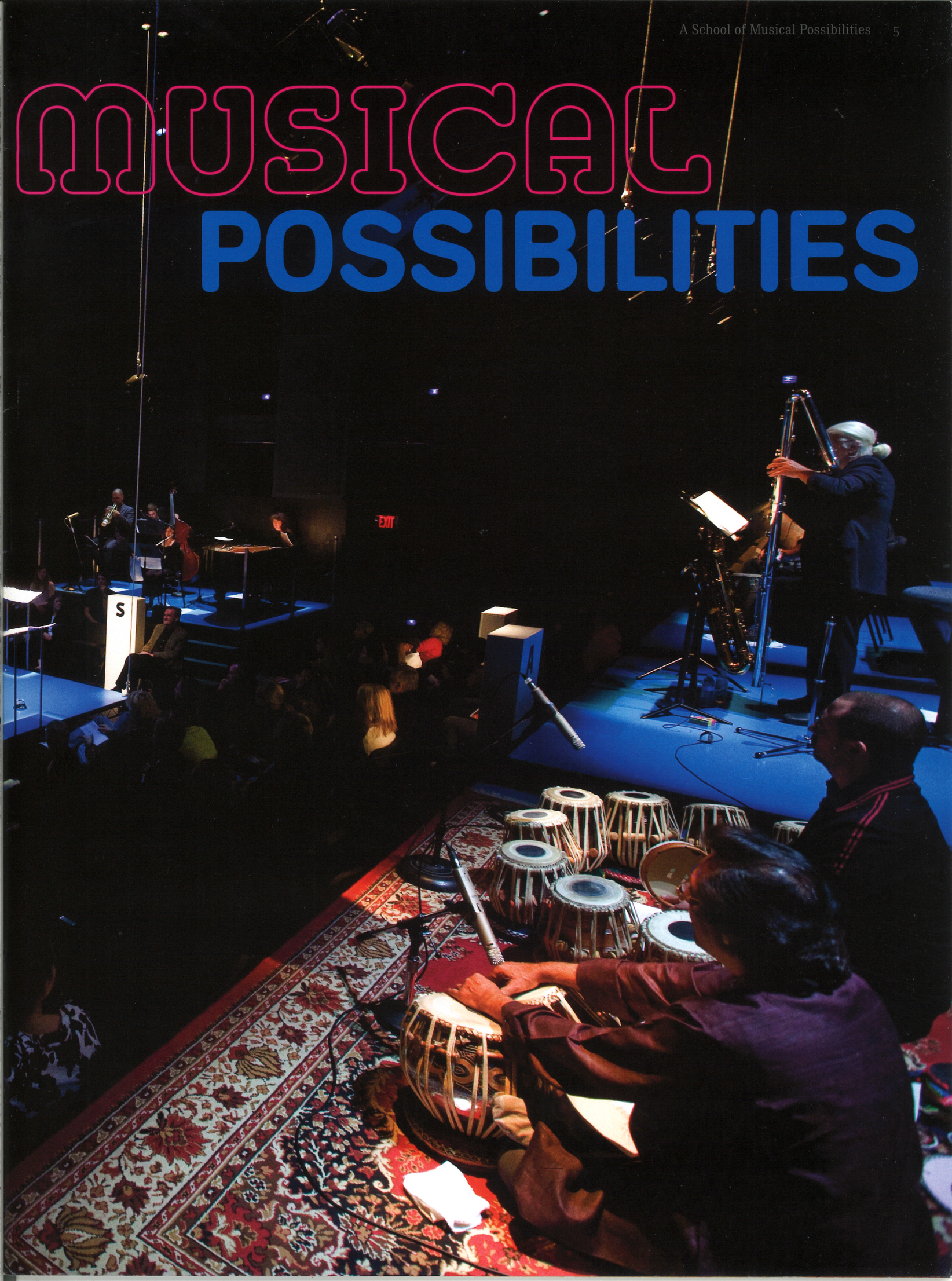


DAVID ROSENBOOM

A 30-piece configuration of the New Century Players, CalArts' professional faculty-student new music ensemble, gave the world premiere of Indian-German composer Sandeep Bhagwati's *Vineland Stelae* at REDCAT last fall. Staged by the Center for New Performance as a spatialized, immersive musical environment, this ambitious full-evening structured improvisation was performed on conventional Western instruments, shakuhachi, sarode, tabla, jal tarang, gamelan metallophones and Ewe drums.

THE HERB ALPERT SCHOOL OF MUSIC AT CALARTS is a healthy, fertile environment for the unfettered evolution of the global human enterprise we call musicmaking. It is a school in tune with the unprecedented stylistic egalitarianism of our age, a school that enables young musicians to recognize their original voices and develop them with skills on the highest level. It is a school that helps students build a frame around their creative profiles, focusing light on their emerging visions, so they may be clearly seen in the vast and varied global cultural landscape. It is a school that fosters informed mobility among cultures and deepens the understanding necessary to be effective in co-creative situations. It is a school that offers tools to empower musical innovators in carving out unique, individual career pathways, which may not have existed before, in our unpredictable and rapidly changing professional milieu. It is a school that adapts flexibly to emerging forms of distribution and information sharing and to changes in what may be considered fundamental for music learning. It is a school that nurtures the tenacity new artistic visions may demand, the will to challenge society's predefinitions and presumptions when necessary, and the perseverance required for artists to manifest the profound gifts they may offer to their evolving cultures. It is a school that embraces a changing world as a world of possibilities.

MUSICAL POSSIBILITIES



Spontaneous musicmaking is the vehicle that transports the full spectrum of musical realization—from the realm of abstraction to that of actualization—with the full engagement of intellect, intuition, imagination, proprioception, and physical and psychological being.

Musical societies now require young musicians to be increasingly flexible and original, and to have an ever-broadening set of skills. Each and every musician today should be focusing on developing her or his original musical voice as a total musician for the emerging world. Our awareness of profound cultural changes and rapidly transforming professional environments is broadening and deepening. In this school of musical possibilities, our response to such evolution is not one of alarm or crisis. Rather, it is one of embrace of opportunity, of seizing this time of creative possibilities in a world where progressive, creative contributions are so needed by our global society.

Musicians must now move with conceptual and technical fluidity from one language to another, from classical to jazz, to networked and interactive, to improvisation and cross-cultural forms, to the experimental and unpredictable. Today's musicians create in, and draw inspiration from, any and all of the fields of earlier musical development. This open cross-pollination of traditions and influences has given rise to a dense, lush arboretum of original sound: a fertile terrain in which to create and re-create anew.

Mastering the fundamentals of music learning requires insight into the essential elements and conditions under which musical evolution can progress. To the extent music can be taught, insightful and inspired music teaching is deeply informed by exploring these elements and conditions. The faculty in a school of possibilities is skilled at recognizing potential in students for things they might not even have envisioned in themselves. This also means recognizing the value of learning from and alongside students. Learning thus becomes co-creative: Learning among students and faculty is shared discovery in infinite, not finite, work and play. So too does teaching become an open process, continuously redefined.

At the core of true musicmaking is a heart of spontaneity. Regardless of traditions, techniques, notations, or aural transmissions, the life-blood of music emerges from the essence of each new and unpredictable moment, in which we might, as composer Luciano Berio has said, "witness that miraculous spectacle of sound becoming sense." Music can be conceived, created and heard as propositional—as proposing whole new frameworks within which to perceive and interact in the world. A school of possibilities is a comfortable home for such experimentation, a place where even the creative listener is regarded as a substantial artist. In an environment that nurtures creative, critical responding, we learn, to quote Berio again, that, "[a]nalysis, like music itself, makes sense when it confirms and celebrates an ongoing dialogue between the ear and the mind... The most meaningful analysis of a symphony is another symphony."

Spontaneous musicmaking–and creative listening is spontaneous musicmaking, too—draws on all areas in the matrix of music education: performance, composition, improvisation, technical skills development, research in new materials, preservation and history, theories of musical languages, cultural understanding, and critical thinking. To become skilled in this discipline, to be become total musicians, students must be informed in all of them.

Spontaneous musicmaking need not be stylistically or culturally delimited.

Similarly, music learning should not be culturally, temporally, stylistically, or historically limited by traditions. Referring specifically to European traditions, Berio comments: "We all know by now that a pianist who claims to be a 'specialist' in the Classical or Romantic repertory, and who is playing Beethoven or Chopin without having had the need of experiencing the music of the twentieth century, is just as shallow as a pianist who claims to be a 'specialist' in contemporary music but whose hands and mind have never been traversed, on a profound level, by Beethoven or Chopin."

Spontaneous musicmaking is the vehicle that transports the full spectrum of musical realization—from the realm of abstraction to that of actualization—with the full engagement of intellect, intuition, imagination, proprioception, and physical and psychological being. The total human becomes the total musician. That's how we learn. Spontaneous musicmaking requires a virtuosic fluidity moving among forms and traditions, honoring and mastering, but not being bound by them; to experience life between categories, to experience the deviant between the notes, wherein lies, to paraphrase Morton Feldman, "the wild beast."

In a school of possibilities, it is not the equipment, the building, not even the curriculum that brings life to learning. These are merely artificial excuses to join together at the same place and the same time—mere flag posts helping us to gather in infinite play. Societies place boundaries around finite play. A school of possibilities chooses boundaries without attachment, as enablers of survival within

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David Rosenboom, dean of The Herb Alpert School of Music at CalArts, is a composer-performer and holder of the Richard Seaver Distinguished Chair in Music. This article is adapted from a speech delivered at the groundbreaking ceremony for The Wild Beast on October 1, 2007.

Trumpeter, composer and improviser Wadada Leo Smith, coordinator of African American Improvisational Music and curator of the school's celebrated Creative Music Festival—an annual showcase that in recent years has featured rare Los Angeles performances by the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Muhal Richard Abrams, Yusef Lateef, and John Zorn, among others. Smith was the holder, from 1993 through 1998, of the Dizzy Gillespie Chair in Music, a faculty chair funded by The Herb Alpert Foundation.

societies. As James Carse writes in *Finite and Infinite Games*, "Schools are a species of finite play to the degree that they bestow ranked awards on those who win degrees from them." These are illusory qualifications, tickets to enter into society's bounded games of competition. Though we recognize the practical necessities required to help our students become effective contributors to culture within these societies, we must regard the curriculum as fluid and infinite, a configuration space of possibilities within which individuals choose their pathways. The curriculum is here to draw out the talents of the people who participate in it, not a game of limits to be conquered. In this way, we attempt to simultaneously honor and erase differentiations. A school of possibilities is about processes and ideas. Carse continues: "[H]eterogeneity and pluralism have to translate themselves into process and ideas, not into forms and manners—forms are often misleading, as they can be perceived independently of their meaning." The simplest, primary universals of musicmaking are that they usually deal with sound and are most often a shared human activity.

A positive, joyful deviancy lies at the core of culture. Carse writes: "Culture continues what Mozart and Rembrandt had themselves continued by way of their work: an original, or deviant shaping of the tradition they received, original enough that it does not invite duplication of itself by others, but invites the originality of others in response."

Artists As Global Community

In our time, forward motion in music must be global. In times when divided governments work against the forces of increasingly shared cultural information, it becomes an urgent priority that we educate students to be culturally mobile, informed, creative citizens of the world. Our great task must be to reduce ignorance and intolerance about cultural groups, to neutralize the pertinacious hoarders of opinions and, paraphrasing T.S. Eliot, minds "not gifted to discover truth but tenacious to hold it."

The arts can help mitigate this, because they are about what we do with each other in fluid, creative spontaneity and collaboration, not in competition. Cultural ignorance leads to the persuasion of others to be our enemies. Because the global field of human imagination is infinitely pluralistic and non-concurrent, culture must come from co-creative emergence. Communication and language are co-creative agreements among peoples. Our school of possibilities is positively engaged in such agreements. We take heart in and gain energy from our experiences of a global community of artists that recognizes differences in finding ways to survive societies, and is remarkably, necessarily and organically unified. The politics of difference, when based on tools of power and dominance, fails to divide this community of artists. In that, too, we take heart.

The Herb Alpert School of Music at CalArts is a school of possibilities. In it, we recognize our responsibility to be continuous learners. The structure of the budget, the tables of time and space and resources, must be driven by what we want and need to do—by how light shines on our priorities—by what we choose as potentially the most powerful and poignant gifts we can make to culture; on actions we can take to help society be more responsive–rather than our actions being subject to the structure of these tables. In our school of musical possibilities, we also celebrate an open and hopeful horizon. We trust in our disciplined, tenacious, creative deviance as infinite possibility.

The success of this endeavor will be as great as the people in our programs are prepared to make it. No administrative or curricular structure will be effective if the spirit and expertise to put it into practice is lacking. What does it take? It takes devotion to mission. This is not a place for those afraid of the sometimes-unimaginable effort required.

What makes The Herb Alpert School of Music at CalArts a great school in the 21st-century cultural landscape? It is the collective expertise about musical possibilities and the will to realize them amassed among all those who participate with openness in our community of artists. It would be very difficult to match these possibilities anywhere else, indeed. How lucky we are!

References

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T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *The Egoist* (vol. 6, no. 4, 1919)

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Making a special appearance at Walt Disney Concert Hall in 2006, the New Century Players were configured into a full orchestra for a radical new interpretation of composer Terry Riley's landmark *In C*—the iconic 1964 piece that signaled the arrival of Minimalism. The performance, led by conductor David Rosenboom, was featured as part of the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Minimalist Jukebox series.

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